Contributions of Comilla to the Buddhist Culture in ancient times

Rasmohan Chakravarti, M.A.Ph.B.

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Contributions of Comilla to the Buddhist Culture in ancient times

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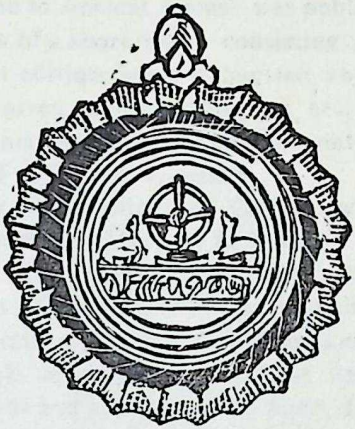
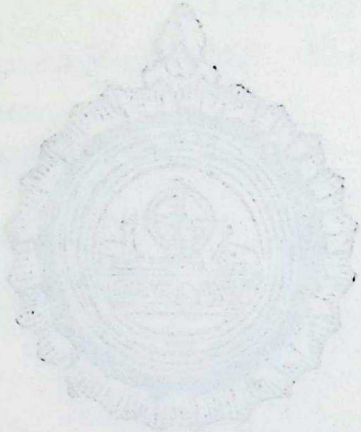


Dharma-Chakra
(The Wheel of Law)

Message of Lord Buddha :

"Go ye, O Bhikkhus, and wander forth for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the Doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness perfect and pure."



Preface to Second Edition

The first edition of "Contributions of Comilla to the Buddhist Culture in Ancient Times" was published in April, 1965 in the form of a short essay consisting of nine pages only. The first edition being exhausted and emboldened by the welcome given to this brochure, a second edition in a revised and enlarged form is brought out to meet the growing demand of inquisitive readers.

Herein the contributions of Comilla which belonged to the ancient Samatata Mandala to Buddhist culture from 6th century to 12th century A. D. have been delineated in all its phases—Cotributions in the domain of Buddhist religion and literature, in arts and sculptures etc. Discoveries of new materials of the history of East Bengal specially epigraphic records and archaeological finds, and the learned contributions of eminent scholars on them have renderd it possible for the author to undertake such a connected narrative. It is expected that it will throw a flood of light on the obscure corners of the social, religious and cultural history of Comilla in olden days. I shall consider my labour worth-while if my studies help others to go deeper into the subject and stimulate further and more elaborate researches. An exhaustive bibliography has been appended for inquisitive readers who would dive deep into the present study.

I crave the indulgence of my readers for a few misprints that have crept in. In the publication of the book in the present form I must express my thankfulness to Rev. Dharma Rakshit Bhikkhu, Vinaya-Sutra-Visharad, Monk-in-charge Kanaka-Stupa-Vihara, Assistant Secretary and Representative of the Sambodhi Society of Pakistan, Comilla for his untiring efforts and enthusiastic zeal.

Rammala Research Library and Museum
Comilla, East Pakistan.
January 9, 1968.

Rasmohan Chakravarti

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Contributions of Comilla to the Buddhist Culture in Ancient Times

Samatata :

The present district of Comilla formed a part of the ancient kingdom of Samatata which finds mention in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta belonging to the 4th century A. D. The Brihat Samhita, a Sanskrit astronomical work of the 6th century A. D. distinguishes it from Vanga. Hiuen T-sang, the famous Chinese pilgrim and traveller who visited the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent in the 7th century A. D. describes Samatata as 'a low and moist country on the Sea-shore'. From the Ashrafpur copper plate it is learnt that in the 7th century A. D., Samatata had a royal residence at Karmanta-vasaka which has been identified by Dr. N. K. Bhattashali with modern Badkamta, situated 12 miles west of the Comilla town. The connection of Samatata with the district of Comilla in later ages is clearly established by the Baghaura image inscription of the time of Mahipala in the 11th century and the Mehar copper plate of Damodara Deva, dated 1234 A. D.

It is difficult to ascertain the boundaries of Samatata which must have varied at different ages. The district of Tippera (Comilla) was definitely included in it, says Dr. R. C.

Majumder. The account of Hiuen T-sang, however, shows that Samatata was an extensive kingdom in his days.

"This country," says he, "was more than 3,000 li (about 500 miles) in circuit. From Samatata the pilgrim journeyed west for over 900 li (about 150 miles) to Tamralipti". From these indications, according to Dr. R. C. Majumder, the kingdom of Samatata in the 7th century A.D. may be reasonably regarded as having comprised the area bounded by the old course of the lower Brahmaputra river in the north, Chittagong hills in the east and the Bay of Bengal on the South. The western boundary was perhaps formed by a branch of the old Ganges (Padma) corresponding to modern Gorai and Madhumati rivers.

Buddhism in Samatata in the 6th century A. D.

The earliest reference of Buddhism and Buddhist monastery in Comilla is supplied by the Gunaighar copper plate of Maharaj Vainya Gupta dated 507-8 A. D. which was discovered in 1925 at Gunaighar, a village about 18 miles to the north-west of the town of Comilla. The plate records a gift of land by Maharaj Vainya Gupta, a Hindu king professing Saivism to Buddhist congregation of monks belonging to the Mahayana School for a Buddhist monastery dedicated to Avalokiteswara. Names of Buddhist Acharyyas Santideva and Jitasena are mentioned in this epigraphic record. The most interesting information of historical importance that we can gather from the Gunaighar copper plate is that Vainya Gupta who describes himself as contemplating the feet of Lord Mahadeva thinks that the religious merit of his parents and himself will be enhanced if he makes such a grant of lands to a Buddhist Vihara. This fact bespeaks most eloquently the spirit of religious toleration

prevailing in Samatata so early as the 6th century A. D. The name of the Vaivarttika Sangha of the Mahayana School is known in this record for the first time, and it was established by the Mahayanist Buddhist Acharyya Santideva. We reproduce below a free translation of the relevant portions from the inscription ;—

"For enhancing the religious merits of myself and my parents, on the request of Maharaja Rudradatta, a slave to our feet, in the village of Kantedadaka situated in the Northern Mandala, eleven patakas of uncultivated lands in five plots are granted by me, by means of a copper plate as an Agrahara in absolute possession, for the purpose of providing perpetually for perfumes, flowers, lights, incense etc. thrice a day unto the Lord Buddha in the abode of the Vaivarttika congregation of monks belonging to the Mahayana order, established by Acharyya Santideva, in the Ashrama Vihara dedicated to Arya Avalokiteswara which was being constructed by that king for the sake of that Acharya, and for the enjoyment of garments, food, beds, seats, medicines for the sick etc. by that congregation; and also for repairing breaks and cracks in the vihara".

That the old Hindu kings of Eastern Bengal (Samatata) used to establish Buddhist monasteries is evident from the mention of Raja Viharas in connection with the boundaries of the granted land. Another Vihara under the supervision of the Buddhist monk Jitasena is mentioned in Vainya Gupta's charter. It is indeed very interesting that even a Brahmanic king allowed Mahayana Buddhism to flourish under his broad patronage even so early as one century before the time of Hiuen T-sang (629—45 A. D.). The present district of Comilla which belonged to the old kingdom of Samatata seems to have been a great strong-hold of the Mahayana school of Buddhism.

Hiuen T-sang's account of Buddhism in Samatata :
(7th century A. D.)

That Buddhism was in a flourishing condition in Samatata is attested to by the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen T-sang who visited this place in the 7th century A. D. According to him there were more than 30 Buddhist monasteries and above 2000 Brethren, all of them belonging to the Sthavira School.

"And the country of San-mo-ta-ta (Samatata) had more than 30 Buddhist monasteries and above 2,000 Brethren, all adherents of the Sthavira School. Near the capital was an Asoka Tope where the Buddha had people from far and near. And the country of San-mo-ta-ta had vestiges of a place for sitting and doing exercise for the Four Buddhas. In a monastery near this spot was a dark-blue Jade image of the Buddha, eight feet high, showing all the distinctive characteristics and exercising marvellous power".

(Watters, on Yuan Chwang's Travels, pp 184—187)

Besides the Buddhist monasteries the Chinese Pilgrim found 100 Deva Temples and numerous Digambara Nirgranthas. From his account it appears that at the time of his visit three principal religions Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism lived side by side in perfect amity and friendship in the kingdom of Samatata.

None of the Buddhist establishments mentioned by Hiuen T-sang in the country of Samatata has yet been identified although extensive areas on the Mainamati range have been opened up by the Archaeological Department of Pakistan recently. Dr. N. K. Bhattashali, however, had proposed to identify one of the monasteries, mentioned by the Pilgrim, near the capital of Samatata with the Mahamaya mound near

Badkamta on the assumption that Badkamta (Karmanta Vasaka of the Ashrafpur copper plate grant) was the capital of Samatata during Hiuen T-sang's time.

Shilabhadra, the Abbot of the Nalanda University:

The greatest contribution of Samatata to the Buddhist world, however, was Shilabhadra himself, the principal of the famous international university of Nalanda in Magadha (Behar). He was a prince of the royal Brahmanic dynasty of Samatata but he embraced Buddhism and became a monk. After undertaking an extensive tour in various parts of the sub-continent he settled down at Nalanda and became a pupil of Dharmapala, the Abbot of the Nalanda Mahavihara. Shilabhadra soon rose to eminence for his profound comprehension of the principles and subtleties of Buddhism and his fame extended to foreign countries. After Dharmapala he became the Sanghasthavira of the Mahavihara. Hiuen T-sang visited the Nalanda University in 637 A. D. and accepted his discipleship to study different schools of Buddhism there. According to the Chinese pilgrim traveller, besides the scriptures of the eighteen schools (Nikayas) of Buddhism, the Brahmanical scriptures, different systems of philosophy, grammar, philology, medical science etc. were most efficiently taught in this University and it was a wonder that Shilabhadra was master of all these different branches of learning and could teach any subject with equal efficiency. Thanks to his lofty moral and spiritual attainments and out of profound reverence for his personality the teachers and students of the University numbering about ten thousand addressed him with the honorific title 'Dharmanidhi' i. e. the repository of religion and spirituality.

This brilliant luminary of the Buddhist world passed away in 654 A. D. The literary works of Shilabhadra have almost passed into oblivion. But fortunately at least one of his works "Arya-Buddha-Bhumi-Vakhyana" is still available in Tibetan translation and is preserved in the Tibetan Tripitaka.

According to the Kailain copper plate discovered at Kailain, a village under Chandpur Sub-division in the District of Comilla Shilabhadra belonged to the Brahmanic Rata dynasty of Samatata. This dynasty was founded by Sree Jiva Dharana Rata, a Brahmin king in the first quarter of the 7th century A.D. His son Sree Dharana Rata and his grand-son prince Bala Dharana Rata, though devout Vaishnavas i. e. worshippers of God Vishnu patronised Buddhism and allowed grants of lands to Buddhist Viharas for the maintenance of Buddhist monks and for their worship. The Kailain copper plate testifies to the co-existence of Brahmanism and Buddhism in the kingdom of Samatata in the 7th century A. D.

The Buddhist Khadga Dynasty of Samatata :

(625—725 A. D.)

The Ashrafpur plates of the Khadgas and the Deulbari Sarvani image inscription of Queen Prabhavati supply the information about the Khadga dynasty ruling over Samatata between 625—725 A. D. The Ashrafpur plates were issued from Karmanta Vasaka which has been identified with Badkamta in the Comilla District. The names of the three reigning kings of the Khadga dynasty disclosed by the Ashrafpur and Deulbari inscriptions are Khadgodyama, his son Jata khadga and his son Deva khadga. The Khadga kings were devout

Buddhists. The Buddha has been invoked in the opening verse of both the Ashrafpur copper plates. In a verse in the second plate Khadgodyama is said to have been successful in making conquests on earth, after having shown devotion towards the Sugata (the Buddha), his Dharma and his Sangha.

The third king of the dynasty named Deva Khadga was the donor of the two grants mentioned above. The donee in both the plates appears to be the revered Buddhist Teacher Sanghamitra, and his monastery, to the support of which the proceeds of the land were to be applied. The gift was made by King Deva Khadga for the longevity of his son, Rajaraja Bhatta and for the sake of the Ratna-traya (the Buddhist triad), in order to destroy "The fears of three bhavas". The mention of the four monastic institutions is important as affording a trace of the existence of Buddhism in Samatata at such an early period.

It is most interesting to note here that King Deva Khadga, a devout Buddhist had his queen-consort Prabhavati who was the worshipper of the Brahmanical Goddess Sarvani, a form of Durga. According to the inscription recorded at the foot of the Sarvani image, found at Deulbari, 14 miles South of Comilla we learn that Deva khadga, the Buddhist husband built the Temple of Sarvani for the worship of his queen Prabhavati and decorated the image with gold plates. This archaeological evidence bears sure testimony to the cordial relationship existing between Hinduism and Buddhism in those days and also to the fact that there was matrimonial connection between the Hindus and the Buddhists.

Seng-chi's Account of Buddhism in Samatata :

(C. 7th–8th Centuries A. D.)

Seng-chi, a Chinese priest and traveller visited Samatata during the reign of the Khadga dynasty between the 7th and 8th centuries A. D. and left us an account of the glorious condition of Buddhism during his time. It should be noted that Buddhism was gradually increasing its influence in Samatata. In Seng-chi's time the number of Buddhist monks and nuns rose from 2000 as recorded by Hiuen T-sang to 4000. The increasing influence of Buddhism in Samatata within fifty years was perhaps due to the ardent and vigorous support of the Khadga dynasty which was devoted to Buddhism.

Seng-chi has furnished us with a glowing description of the condition of Buddhism during the reign of Rajaraja bhatta of the Khadga dynasty and the part played by him in its propagation. He was an ardent worshipper of the Three Jewels and played the part of a great upasaka (lay devotee). His sincerity was profound and faith very great. His glory exceeded that of his predecessors. Everyday he made 100,000 statues in moulded clay and read 100,000 stanzas of Maha-prajna-paramita sutras and made use of 100,000 fresh flowers. In the capital city there were more then 4000 monks and nuns. All these were entertained by the king. The best and the most learned Bhikshus in the whole of India were assembled in this kingdom (i. e. Samatata) being attracted by the renown of the king, which reached far and wide. Seng-chi himself lived in the royal temple and received extra-ordinary honours.

When the royal party went, describes Seng-chi, an image of Avalokiteswara was placed in the front: His banners and standards concealed the sun, and instrumental music filled the

space, the statues of Buddhas, bhikshus and upasakas all marched in front and the king followed behind them. Every morning royal messengers went to the congregations of monks and nuns and said, "I am commanded to ask if you have passed a good night." The monks and nuns replied, "We hope His Majesty is in good health. May he live long and his kingdom remain in peace". Only after these messengers had come back and reported did the king begin to transact the business of the state.

Badkamta :

The Ashrafpur plates were issued from a place called Karmanta, which has been identified with Badkamta, 12 miles west of Comilla. It was an important centre of Buddhism in the Khadga period. About a mile to the north-east of Badkamta stands a curious Mound about 25 feet high surmounted by a lingam. It is locally known as the Mahamaya mound. It may be, according to Dr. N. K. Bhattasali, the remains of the Stupa seen by Hiuen T-sang.

The tract round Badkamta undoubtedly appears to have been a strong-hold of the Buddhist culture. Belasa, situated only a mile west of Badkamta yielded a magnificent image of Avalokiteswara. The life-size image of Vajrapani Bodhisattva hails from Subhapur, about 5 miles north of Badkamta. East of Subhapur stands the village Viharmandal—a distinctly Buddhist name, where an image of Jambhala has been found. A fine image of Dhyani Buddha was discovered in the village of Bagherpar close to Viharmandal. Another beautiful image of the Goddess Marichi was discovered at Pior about four miles south east of Badkamta. All these facts prove the existence of Buddhism and Buddhist institution in and around Badkamta.

Samatata under the Palas :

The decline of the Khadgas of Samatata and the Guptas of Magadha was followed, for about a century, by anarchy in Bengal. It is only after the rise of the Palas in North Bengal towards the beginning of the 9th century A. D. that the thread of the political and the cultural history of the country can be resumed.

The rule of the Palas who were Buddhists was undoubtedly the most glorious period of the history of Bengal. The earlier Pala kings such as Dharmapala (776–810 A. D.) and Devapala (810–850 A. D.) were very powerful princes of their time in Northern India. The Pala rulers though Buddhists were very tolerant and Buddhism and Hinduism flourished side by side during their regime. Dharmapala a Buddhist by faith and an ardent patron of Buddhist culture allowed vedic sacrifices and offered liberal gifts to the Brahmins. Many of his ministers were Brahmins. Such religious toleration was in evidence during the whole period of administration of the Palas of Bengal. Flourishing schools of sculpture arose all over the country and Taranath, the Tibetan historian has preserved for us the names of two master sculptors, Dhiman and his son Vitapala (9th century A.D.) But thousand other sculptors like these two, working in thousand different centres of culture, rapidly covered the country with a multitude of images of both Buddhistic and Brahmanical deities in stone and metal.

During the four centuries of the rule of the Palas, Mahayana Buddhism, under their patronage beeame a powerful international force, and exercised dominant influence from Tibet in the north to the islands of the Malaya Archipelago in the south.

The Palas must have been passing their most critical days in the 10th century. In South eastern and South western Bengal two independent kingdoms were established by the Chandras and Kambojas respectively. With the accession of Mahipala I (980—1030 A. D.) there seems to have been a revival of the Pala power. The Baghaura image inscription shows that Samatata was included within his kingdom in his third regnal year.

This image of Vishnu in black stone was discovered at Baghaura in the Brahmanbaria Sub-division of the District of Comilla. The pedestal is inscribed with four lines of an inscription which shows that the image was installed in the 3rd year of King Mahipala in the country of Samatata by a marchant Lokadatta,[1] son of Vasudatta an inhabitant of the village of Bilakinda, which may be identified with the village of Bilkenduai closeby.

The Buddhist Deva Dynasty

(C. 7th - 8th Centuries A D.)

After the Khadgas came the Devas, a new Buddhist line of kings discovered during the course of the Mainamati Excavations. They seem to have established their rule in Samatata with the centre round Mainamati hills. They appear to have been contemporaries of the the early-Palas, the powerful Buddhist rules of North-Bengal.

The two copper plates discovered at Salban Vihara have yielded informations of great significance and value. One of the plates contains two royal grants and the genealogy of the Devas, a new dynasty of Buddhist rulers, hither to unknown

to history. The seal on the top of this plate contains below the Dharma Chakra and the two seated deer symbols, the royal title of the Devas "Sri Bhangala Mrigankasya". This title was originally adopted by the Khadgas, their predecessors.

The first grant was issued by Sri Ananda Deva. Its genealogy portion mentions the names of three rulers, namely Sri Santi Deva, his son Sri Vira Deva, and the latter's son Ananda Deva.

The second grant on the reverse contains an endorsement by Sri Bhava Deva, son and successor of the donor. The date is given as the 13th day of the month of Bhadra of the 12th regnal year of Sri Bhava Deva. All the kings mentioned in the plate bear imperial titles such as Parama-Saugata, Parama Bhattaraka, Paramesvara and Maharajadhiraja which evidently indicate that they were independent rulers.

The Devas seem to have come to power not much long after the Khadgas, as suggested by the style of writing in their inscriptions and coins, which bear a close resemblance with the later Gupta script. In the present stage of our knowledge, according to Dr. F. A. Khan, the Superintendent of Exploration, the reign of the Devas can reasonably be assigned to a period between the last part of the 7th and the middle of the 8th centuries A. D. Nothing definite is known at present either about their decline or their successors.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that a huge monastic establishment with an attached tank of very large size is locally called Ananda Raja's Bhita & Dighi, It appears to bear the name of the third ruler of the Deva dynasty, Sri Ananda Deva.

The Chandras of Rohitagiri

(900 - 1050 A. D.)

The disintegration of the Pala empire was followed immediately by chaos and taking advantage of this troubled situation, South East Bengal was brought under a new dynasty, the Chandras who ruled from 900—1050 A. D. with Rohitagiri as their capital. It is now generally agreed that Rohitagiri is identical with Lalmai, both meaning Red Hill, which is the Southern end of the Range of picturesque low hills near Comilla. The Northern end of this Range is called Mainamati after the name of Queen Mainamati, the wife of Manik Chandra of this dynasty.

The first king of this new dynasty was Layaha Chandra mentioned in an inscription on the pedestal of the image of Nataraja Siva in black stone which was discovered at Bharella, P. S. Badkamta, Dt. Comilla. The inscription records the consecration of the image by Bhabu Deva, son of Kusuma Deva, who is designated as the ruler of Karmanta (modern Badkamta) about 4 miles south west of the village where the image was found. This would definitely locate the kingdom of Layaha Chandra in the territory about modern Comilla.

Next we come to know of the Chandra dynasty from four copper plates of Sri Chandra which give us the following genealogy : (1) Purna Chandra, (2) Suvarna Chandra, (3) Trailokya Chandra and (4) Sri Chandra. According to verse 3 of the Rampal copper plate, "Suvarna Chandra became a follower of the Buddha". It is probable, therefore, that until his time the family followed Brahmanical religion. But hence forth the family was undoubtedly Buddhists as is

evidenced by the invocation to the Buddha at the beginning of all their copper plate grants, the epithet "Parama Saugata" before the names of kings, and the emblem of the Wheel of Law (Dharma Chakra mudra) in their seal like that of the Pala Kings.

Trailokya Chandra, son of Suvarna Chandra appears to have been a great warrior. He is said to have been the main stay of the king of Harikela, which is another name for Vanga. He appears finally to have acquired the kingship of Chandradvipa (modern District of Backerganj). Hence he assumed the title Maharajadhiraja.

His son Sri Chandra assumed the full imperial titles Parama-Saugata, Paramesvara, Parama-Bhattaraka and Maharajadhiraja. He inherited his father's dominions and possibly added to them. He issued his copper plate grants from Vikramapura which has been identified with the extensive ruins of a city known at present by the name of Rampal in the Dacca district. Sri Chandra appears to have flourished at the close of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century A. D.

Govinda Chandra who is referred to in the accounts of Rajendra Chola's invasion of Bengal (1021 A. D.), appears to have succeeded Sri Chandra. The Tirumalai Inscription of Rajendra Chola (1025 A.D.) describes Govinda Chandra as king of Vangaladesa (i. e. Southern Bengal). That Govinda Chandra ruled also in Eastern Bengal is proved by two inscriptions dated in his 12th and 23rd regnal year recently discovered in Vikrampur, within the District of Dacca.

A study of the Kalachuri records shows that the Chandra kingdom had to bear the brunt of the invasions of the valorous Kalachuri kings. It is very likely that the Chandra

kingdom was finally destroyed by the invasions of Karna. The Chandra kingdom does not appear in the history of Bengal after the middle of the eleventh century A. D.

The Tibetan sources tell us that Tantric Buddhism flourished in Vangala under the Chandras and that king Gopi Chandra (Govinda Chandra), who is associated by tradition with a particular form of mysticism, belonged to this dynasty. The famous Buddhist scholar of Vikramapura, Atisa Dipankara (11th century A.D.), is said to have been born in the royal house of that place. It is, therefore, not improbable that he was related to the Chandras of Rohitagiri.

New data about Chandra Kings from Mainamati Excavations :

In course of Mainamati archaeological exploration three copper plates belonging to the Chandra dynasty have been newly discovered at a mound locally known as Charpatra-mura. It is from these plates that we learn not only the correct genealogy and military exploits, but also the social, cultural, economic and political condition of their kingdom.

Two of these plates belong to Sri Ladaha Chandra Deva, the son of Kalyan Chandra and grand son of Sri Chandra. The third plate was issued by Sri Govinda Chandra Deva, son and successor of Ladaha Chandra Deva. All these plates were issued from the royal capital at Vikrampur. The lands were situated at Samatata Mandala.

Genealogy of the Chandra dynasty as reconstructed from the Mainamati copper plates runs as follows : (1) Purna Chandra, (2) Suvarna Chandra, (3) Trailokya Chandra

(4) Sri Chandra, (5) Kalyana Chandra, (6) Ladaha Chandra and (7) Govinda Chandra.

It appears quite clear from these inscriptions that the capital of the Chandras from the time of Sri Chandra to Govinda Chandra was at Vikrampur in the Dacca District. What position Rohitagiri occupied in this kingdom and what part it played in its relation to Vikrampur, is not yet known. But the claim of the Chandras to belong to the family of the rulers of Rohitagiri (Rohitagiri-bhujam-vamsa) seems to suggest that in the early part of their rule, Rohitagiri enjoyed the position of the royal seat.

It appears from these inscriptions that the whole of Samatata Mandala and the larger part of Vanga were included in the Chandra kingdom. The Mainamati plates tell us of a long succession of wars with the Palas for three generations which started in Trailokya Chandra's time, and in which they are described to be always victorious. The plates do not mention any military exploit of the last two kings viz., Sri Ladaha Chandra Deva and Govinda Chandra Deva.

The Chandra kingdom appears to have passed under the authority of the later Palas of Gauda after its decline in the middle of the 11th century A. D.

Queen Mainamati and Gopi Chandra :

'Mainamati' the name by which the village and the adjoining hill are known to-day, recalls the name of Queen Mayanamati (Madanavati), the wife of Manik Chandra of the Chandra dynasty that ruled in Bengal in the 10th and 11th centuries A. D. Many ballads are popularly sung in Bengal in which the queen and her son Gopi Chandra figure. According

to Taranath and some of these ballads, Gopi Chandra was a ruler of Mrikula (now known as Meharkula in Comilla District).

Queen Mayanamati was a disciple of Gorakh-nath (or Goraksha-nath) the great Saivite Yogi and Siddha while Hadipa or Jalandhari-pada figures in the legend cycle of her son Gopi Chandra. This legend cycle centres round the unwilling renunciation of Gopi Chandra (or Govinda Chandra) while young of his kingdom and his wives Aduna and Paduna at the instigation or insistence of his mother Queen Mainamati, who had come to know by her Yoga powers that he could not otherwise be saved from premature death. Gopi Chandra left his home as a disciple of Jalandhari-pada or Hadipa, a Guru of low caste, who himself was a disciple of Gorakhnath. After passing through severe tests and trials continuing for several years Gopi Chandra came out triumphant and was reunited with his family and kingdom.

The Siddha poets of the old Bengali Charyyapadas :

We find a hierarchy of Siddha poets of the Buddhist Sahajayana school who figure in the Mainamati—Gopi Chandra legends. They are Matsyendra Nath, Goraksha Nath, Jalandhari pada or Hadi-pa and Kanha-pa or Krishna pada, the last mentioned being assignable to the end of the twelfth century A. D. Kanha-pa, a Siddha poet of the old Bengali Charya-padas speaks of Jalandhari-pada in one of his poems as one would speak of one's guru. The subject matter of these charya padas is highly mystical, centring round the esoteric doctrines and erotic and Yogic theories and practices of the Sahajiya School of Buddhism.

Mystic Buddhism :

(C. 10th – 12th centuries A. D.)

Buddhism, which attained its Golden Age under th Pala rulers of Bengal witnessed the rise and growth of a new trend in the Buddhist religion and philosophy quite unlike that which Hiuen T-sang describes in the middle of the 7th century A. D. The Mahayana had developed into various forms of mysticism all of which laid greater stress on the esoteric aspect of the religion.

The mystic Buddhism had developed three important forms : Vajra-yana, Sahaja-yana and Kalachakra-yana. Vajra-yana and Sahaja-yana represented two aspects of the same mysticism, the first laid stress on ceremonials which had only mystic implications, whereas the latter dealt with the more advanced stage of that mysticism in which ceremonials had no place. The goal of both Vajra-yana and Sahaja-yana, however, seems to be the same, viz. Mahasukha or perfect bliss.

Although the ultimate goal of the Kalachakrayana was the same i. e. Mahasukha, as the other two schools, it attached great importance to the time factor, the 'muhurta' 'tithi' constellations etc. in the practice of Yoga. So the knowledge of astronomy and astrology came to play a prominent part in this school.

The leaders of this new movement have been all celebrated in Buddhist tradition as Siddhas, and their number is traditionally reckoned as eighty four. The rise of this mysticism was some how connected with Bengal which played a great role in its dissemination throughout India. We have strong reason to believe that they lived sometime

between the 10th and 12th centuries A. D. From the number of works attributed to them, it appears that the principal amongst the Siddhas were Saraha, Nagarjuna, Tillopada, Naropada, Advayavajra and Kahnupada. Writings of Luipada Sabara, Bhusuku, Kukkuri etc. also have been preserved. Many of the Siddha writers belonged to Bengal and wrote mystic poems in old Bengali, called charya-padas.

Nathism :

Nathism originated from the religion of the Siddha charyyas. The great teachers of this religion are called Nathas, and the most famous amongst them were Minanatha, Gorakhnatha, Chauranghinatha etc. Their teachings exercised such a considerable influence, particularly in Northern and Eastern Bengal, that their miraculous tales became the subject of popular songs in Bengali which are of great importance for the early history of Bengali literature. Many old Bengali manuscripts pertaining to the Natha literature such as Goraksha Vijaya, Minachetana, Mainamatirgana have been recovered from the Mainamati-Lalmai region and the adjoining villages.

The Sahajiya cult of Buddhism :

Among other Buddhist mystic philosophies, the Sahajiya school established itself deeply in the soil of Bengal before the time of Chaitanya (1486 –1533 A. D.). The famous poet Chandidasa was the earliest Bengali writer on Sahajiya, who probably lived sometime in the 14th century A. D. It is possible to trace certain fundamental doctrines of the Buddhist Sahaja-yana in the numerous modified songs and the Krishna Kirtana of Chandidasa which have come down to us.

The oldest reference to Sahajiya is found in an inscription of the 13th century, engraved on a copper plate found at Mainamati. It records a grant of land in favour of a Buddhist monastery built in the city of Pattikera by Ranavankamalla Harikala Deva in A. D. 1220 in the 17th year of his reign and it speaks of a superior officer of the royal groom as practising Sahaja dharma in Pattikeraka (Sahajadharmasu Karmasu).

The Kingdom of Pattikera :

The existence of the kingdom of Pattikera, in the district of Comilla, may be traced as far back as the 1 th century A. D. The earliest reference to it occurs in a manuscript of Ashta-Sahasrika Prajnaparamita preserved in the library of the Cambridge University. This Ms., copied in the year 1015 A. D. contains the picture of a sixteen-armed goddess with the label "Pattikera Chundavara bhavane Chunda ' It proves that early in the 11th century A. D. the image of the Buddhist goddess Chunda was worshipped in the temple of Pattikera. The picture shows the goddess as sitting on the lotus seat in Vajrasana and having 16 arms. The two normal hands perform the mudra of Dharma Chakra pravartana. The two lower-most hands appear to be in Varada and Abhaya mudra. The remaining hands hold different weapons.

Intercourse between the kingdom of Pattikera and Burma :

The Burmese Chronicles contain many references to this kingdom. Pattikera was the capital of the kingdom of that name mentioned in Burmese Chronicles as Patikkara

or Pateikkara and which may be traced as far back as the 11th Century A. D. A pargana of Comilla District which extends to Mainamati hills is still known as Patikara or Paitkara. According to the Burmese Chronicles the vast kingdom of king Anoratha (1044-77 A D.) of Pagan was bounded on the west by the foreign kingdom of Patikkara. The celebrated love romance of the prince of Pateikkara with the only daughter of king Kyanzittha (1084-1112 A. D.) forms the theme of Burmese poems and dramas and is acted on the Burmese stage even upto the present day. Pateikkara is mentioned in a Burmese inscription of 1184 A. D. The healthy intercourse between the two kingdoms was kept up by the next king Alaungsitthu (1112-87 A. D.) who had as one of his queens a Pateikkara princess. King Narathu (1187-91 A. D.) who killed this foreign princess with his own hand, was in his turn murdered by desperados sent by the king of Pateikkara for revenge. The event took place in 1189 or 1191 A. D., not more than 15 years before Harikaladeva, mentioned in the Mainamati copper plate, came to the throne. King Harikala was thus not unlikely the immediate succcssor of the king of Pattikera who was resposible for the death of Narathu.

The Mainamati Copper-plate of Ranavankamalla Harikaladeva :

(1220 A. D)

This Copperplate was discovered towards the end of the year 1803 while digging earth for the repairs of the highway through the Mainamati hills, about 5 miles to the

west of the town of Comilla. The inscription records a grant of land measuring 20 Dronas in a village named Bejakhanda in favour of a Buddhist monastery built in the city of Pattikera. The Vihara was dedicated to the Goddess Durgottara, a form of Tara named in the Sadhana-mala as Durgottarini Tara. The village Bejakhanda of the inscription cannot be definitely identified now. There is a village Bejabadi near the foot of the hills on the west which may be identified with the village referred to in the plate. In verse 3 the grantor is described as being proficient in the rites of the famous Sahaja cult of later Buddhism.

The extraordinary nature of the three names of the grantor Dhadi-eba, his father Hedi-eba and the writer Medini-eba all apparently belonging to the same family deserve special notice. Here we have evidence of a respectable family of Burmese origin which settled and Survived in the 13th century A. D. in the district of Comilla. For 'ba' and 'ye-ba' (modified 'e-va') seem to be the characteristic of Burmese names even now. The inscription may thus be regarded as corroborating the intercourse between the kingdom of Pattikera and Burma as recorded in the Burmese Chronicles.

The inscription records a grant of land in favour of a Buddhist monastery built in the city of Pattikera by Ranavankamalla Sri Harikaladeva in A. D. 1220, in the 17th year of his reign. Harikaladeva who ascended the throne in 1204, A. D., and was ruling till 1220, A. D., was undoubtedly an independent king. The founder of another royal line, the Deva family also set up an independent kingdom about the same time in the immediate neighbourhood. Both of

them have taken advantage of the decline of the Senas to establish their independence in the 13th Century A. D.

Kanaka-Stupa Vihara :

The famous Pattikeraka Vihara or the Kanaka-Stupa-Vihara of the Pala period which ranked in importance with such ancient Buddhist monasteries as Odantapuri, Somapura, Vikramsila and Nalanda was probably situated somewhere in the Mainamati—Lalmai area. According to Mr. T. N. Rama Chandran, Ananda Raja's palace mound in Mainamati was definitely a monastery, probably the renowned Pattikeraka monastery itself which was otherwise called Kanaka-Stupa-Vihara.

Acharyya Vinaya-Sri-mitra along with several other Kashmirian monks resided in the Kanaka-Stupa-Vihara. It was at the request of Vinaya-Sri-mitra that Siddhacharyya Nadapada undertook his famous work Vajra-pada-Sara-Samgraha.

Decline of Buddhism in Samatata :

Buddhism received patronage in Samatata by the ruling dynasties like the Khadga kings (C. 7th-8th Centuries A. D.), the Chandras (C. 10th—11th Centuries A. D), the Deva kings and the minor ruling chiefs of Pattikera (C. 11th —13th Centuries A. D.)

The Sena kings do not seem to have had any special leaning towards Buddhism, and Buddhism does not seem to have had any patronage from them. The Buddhist institutions soon disappeared for want of royal support.

In the section 'Mystic Buddhism' we have seen before that on account of the great emphasis on the esoteric aspect of the religion, Buddhism was soon unhinged. As time passed on, less and less importance was attached to the ceremonial aspect which still retained a faint stamp of Buddhism. "The ceremonial being once completely eliminated," says Dr. P. C. Bagchi, "it was not long before what remained of Buddhism was absorbed in the Brahmanical Tantric system of Bengal, which by an inevitable process had attained a similar form. This assimilation had surely begun before the end of the Pala period and was completed before the 14th Century."

In the hands of the Siddhacharyyas, Buddhism in Bengal lad attained a stage where its assimilation to Saktism was an easy matter. The fusion of Saktism with this type of mystic Buddhism gave rise to a new school of Saktism called 'Kaula' on the one hand, and certain forms of popular religion on the other, both of which have survived till our times.

Mainamati Excavations and Archaeological finds :

Recently systematic excavations in the Mainamati—Lalmai Range have brought to light a picturesque Buddhist establishment locally known as Salban Vihara. The Archaeological finds reveal a clear picture of the Buddhist civilisation and culture which is believed to have flourished under powerful ruling Buddhist dynasties—the Devas, the Chandras and the Pattikera kings. The whole range of hillocks of about 11 miles is studded with numerous other

Buddhist structures awaiting the excavator's spade and offers immense archaeological potentialities. The distribution of crowded ruins along the entire length of the range itself speaks of a forgotten prosperous Buddhist civilization which flourished between 8th and 12th centuries A. D.

The Mainamati – Lalmai range is a light red plateau, five miles west of Comilla, rising from 50 ft. to, at places, 100 ft. in height and extending over 11 miles north to south. Its importance as a centre of ancient culture was recognised as far back as 1875 when the work on the Comilla– Kalirbazar Road had exhumed the remains of a very thick and extensive boundary wall. A copper-plate inscription of Ranavankamalla Harikaladeva discovered some where on the Lalmai range in 1803 describes the city of Pattikera, as adorned with forts and Viharas. This description accords well with the ruins on the plateau. But the actual site of this city which had been referred to in the Burmese chronicles of 11th and 12th centuries A. D. was accidentally discovered during the years of World War II. Digging trenches for defence (1943-44) a military contractor cut through a few mounds and extracted a large amount of bricks from well-planned structures. The mistake was realised only after his men had already done considerable damage to those vestiges of great archaeological value. A large number of bricks and reliefs had been dug out and used up when further damage was stopped by the Archaeological Department.

The entire hill is covered with mounds of different sizes. They have been divided under 18 main groups of which only a few have been hitherto scientifically examined.

1. Ananda Raja's Palace Ruins (Mound No. 5)

The mound No. 5 which is locally known as Ananda Raja's Palace was the scene of heavy depredation for bricks. Cart-loads of bricks were removed from this mound before action could be taken to check. The ruins revealed, however, on plan a square monastery about a furlong each side, with an arrangement of a central temple. The plan very much resembles the Paharpur monastery (in Rajshahi Dt.) and though it was not probably so nicely decorated, it must have vied with Paharpur in richness, exuberance and colour. In the central temple-enclosure were recovered a large number of terracotta plaques with carvings drawn from divine, semi divine, human, animal, bird and aquatic lives and ornamental bricks. It was evident that the decorative plaques were meant to catch the eye of circum-ambulating worshippers. An illuminating description of the Terracotta plaques which were available may be found in the article "Recent Archaeological discoveries along Mainamati and Lalmai Range" by Mr. T. N. Ramachandran M. A., published in B. C. Law Volume, Part II, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1946.

2. Rupban-Kanya's Palace (Mound No. 6)

To the south of Ananda Raja's Palace mound stands mound No. 6 which is called Rupban-Kanya's Palace. Though brick depradation was heavy, traces of structure, perhaps a monastery with arrangement of central temple and surrounding cells can be noticed. A stone cubical

pillar base showing the design of a Chaitya window on each side was found in the centre of the mound suggesting the existence of a stone mandapa or shrine. Terracotta plaques and bricks of huge size were also in evidence.

3. Bhoja Raja's Palace (Mound No. 7)

Near Rupban-Kanya's Palace are the ruins called Bhoja Raja's Palace in an area about 400 ft. square. The arrangement was similar to that of Ananda Raja's Palace with a small mound about 30 ft. high, in centre. The digging for bricks here had exposed well-laid out brick courses and a square temple with massive walls and with its basement profusely decorated with carved plaques and ornamental bricks. The plaques represented Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Vidyadharas and other celestial denizens not to speak of human, fauna and flora studies. It was probably a Buddhist Vihara with the temple or shrine in the centre as at Paharpur.

4. Rupban-Mura (Mound No. 10)

The structure of mound No. 10 seems to have stood on a cruciform resembling in plan the central temple of Paharpur. Its sides have been ravaged beyond recognition. The remains, however, prove that from the sides of its reentrant angles to the inner halls and galleries it was richly decorated with carved plaques and mouldings bearing interesting designs. It was reported that from this ruin seven pots containing tiny images of Buddha in bronze were

found. Thirteen of these miniatures were recovered. They are all small Votive images such as Buddhist pilgrims carried on their pilgrimage and represent Vajrasana Buddha with the Vajra or thunder-bolt clearly shown on the pedestal in front and with the Buddhist creed formula embossed on the out side. The find of these images as well as the subject-matter of the carvings on a majority of the plaques recovered from this area at once mark this as a Buddhist establishment, probably a monastery with arrangement of temples, as at Paharpur, and flanking cells as in a Buddhist monastery.

5. Kotbari (Mound No 9)

To the west of Rupban-Mura is Kotbari which is supposed to contain the ruins of a fort. The diggings for bricks had been very heavy resulting in the almost complete dismantling of the structures. One such structure exposed showed on plan a pyramidal temple with re-entrant corners of walls, and surrounded by rows of cells. Probably it was also a monastery.

The Archaeological Department of Pakistan undertook systematic scientific excavations in the Mainamati—Lalmai range since 1955 under the able guidance of Dr. F. A Khan, the Superintendent of Exploration who has made wonderful archaeological discoveries in East Pakistan in course of a few years. The excavations have been carried on so far in the following archaeological sites viz.,

(1) Salban Vihara, (2) Kotila-Mura and (3) Charpatra-Mura.,

6. The Salban-Vihara :

By far the most important Buddhist structure unearthed during the recent excavations is situated at Salbanpur about six miles west of the Comilla town. Salbanpur is a note-worthy place in Natha traditions belng associated with king Salban and his son Chowrangi Natha alias Gabhur Siddha. Chowrangi Natha who was a disciple of Matsyendra natha is recognized as one of the eighty-four Siddhacharyyas and belongs to the first half of the ninth century A. D.

Here systematic excavations have revealed an extensive Buddhist establishment, consisting of an imposing central shrine, enclosed by a series of well-laid monastic cells. The central shrine which is doubtlessly one of the biggest Buddhist monuments in East Pakistan is known from a copper plate grant to have been built by the Deva ruler Sri Bhavadeva. The copper plate was apparently issued from his capital, Devaparvata. Together with this a large number of important silver coins inscribed with 'Pattikera' legend have also been exhumed from the early period cubicles of the monastery. Sri Viradeva is now known to be the first ruler of the dynasty. From another copper plate from the same site we also learn that he was succeeded by his son Ananda Deva. The last few lines of the second grant endorse the earlier grant of Ananda Deva by his son Bhavadeva II. These grants are engraved in the eastern script of the 9th century A. D. which is akin to Nagari.

A. The Central Shrine :

The Central Shrine of the Salban-Vihara, constructed of brick, is cruciform in plan, measuring 170 ft. from arm to arm and resembles closely the plan of Paharpur temple with projecting angles and recessed corners. Another shrine close to it, consisting of an enclosed oblong cellar and an entrance passage is preceded by a columned terrace. The unusual plan of this Buddhist sanctuary, bearing close similarity with the style of Hindu temples appears to have developed in south-east Bengal during 7th.—8th. centuries A. D.

The central shrine was provided with a stepped terrace facing the main entrance on north, and an ambulatory passage of 7 ft. wide, encircling the whole edifice which communicated with the four cells in each arm of the cross. It is presumed that each of these cells contained a large bronze image of Buddha as is indicated by the existence of such an image in the western cell.

The establishment at Salban Vihara is enclosed by a series of 115 well-arranged monastic cells which originally must have accommodated a large number of monks and students.

B. Subsidiary Structures :

Excavations in the court yard have revealed a few interesting subsidiary structures. One of them, a large pillared hall with two attached chambers in the south-eastern corners of the court yard, appears to have been the community dining establishment of the monastery in its later stages. Other subsidiary buildings in the area include

two small shrines on the western side of the central shrine. The larger one facing east is of oblong shape, surrounded by a spacious pradakhshina path ; it consists of a rectangular hall in the front and a small cella behind in the west. The smaller shrine, only partially exposed at present, is of square shape with recessed corners, each containing three decorated brick pillars of circular shape.

A study of the plastic terracotta art, sculpture and other architectural peculiarities tends to prove that it was contemporary with that of the Pala period art, as clearly illustrated at Paharpur. The square lay out of the monastery and the cruciform plan of central shrine in both sites are identical.

C. Importance of the discovery :

Dr. F. A. Khan, the Superintendent of Exploration makes the following observation with regard to the discovery of the Salban Vihara, "The exposed remains undoubtedly represent a unique monument, a land mark in the religious and architectural history of Bengal. That such an imposing structure should have been totally forgotten without leaving any trace behind, is surprising. It is, however, a matter of satisfaction that the present excavations have rescued what remains of it still now."

D. The architectural design of the Central shrine :

From a study of the architectural design of the Central shrine of the Salban Vihara discovered in course of Mainamati Excavations Dr. F. A. Khan is of opinion that the

shrine presents a fully developed and finished example of Buddhist architecture of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. So far as is known, close parallels to this architectural style exist in central Java at Kalasan (778 A. D.) and in Burma at Pagan (Ananda temple of 1090 A. D.). "But as both the examples," observes Dr. F. A. Khan, "are of later dates and since a large number of shrines with similar ground floor plan lies buried in the neighbourhood of this shrine, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that this was an original conception signifying the development of an indegenous style of religious architecture, evolved by the synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist elements during the 7th—8th centuries A. D ; and that with the spread of Buddhism this idea also travelled from East Pakistan to the South East Asian countries, rather than spreading from that direction."

7. Kutila Mura :

This mound is situated on a prominent hillock commanding a good view of the Mainamati area. It is about three miles to the north of the Salban Vihara. At Kotila Mura, the three principal excavated stupas represent three Jewels, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. They from a unique group of monuments in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. In their plan these remains are different from those unearthed at Salbanpur. The square basements of the Stupas are surmounted by circular drums and hemispherical domes ; the crowning harmikas and finials are missing.

The central Stupa contained 8 box-chambers ; the superstructures of other two Stupas are of solid brick masonry. The ground plan of the central Stupa is in the form of a Dharma Chakra. Hundreds of enshrined miniature votive Stupas and unbaked clay sealings were found inside the central Stupa. A number of grey coloured sculptures in soft stone portraying in high relief figures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist goddesses, seated on lotus thrones was discovered in the middle Stupa.

Three grand stair cases on the east side led up the pilgrims to the inside of the shrines. The main additions, repairs and reconstructions which these shrines successively underwent in three periods appear to have been all over the place.

8. Charpatra Mura :

The mound is about a mile and a half to the north-west of Kotila Mura. It is a flat eminence rising to a height of 35 ft. in the centre. Here the excavations have laid bare the remains of a Buddhist shrine 55 ft. in width from north to south and 105 ft. in length from east to west. The approach to the building was on the east, where stood the principal gateway. It was connected with a spacious hall on the west by a brickpaved path Four massive brick pillars supported the roof of this hall, and a covered entrance led to the cella on the west side. Four copper plates and a bronze relic casket were discovered in the entrance passage of this shrine.

Important Archaeological Finds :

The Mainamati Excavations have yielded a rich harvest of valuable antiquities which include copper-plates, gold and silver coins, bronze relic caskets, a number of bronze votive images of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Buddhist gods and goddesses, stone sculptures, a large number of terracotta plaques and carved bricks, pots and potsherds and a large variety of miscellaneous objects of every day use.

A. Copperplates :

Of all the antiquities discovered in course of Mainamati excavations the inscribed copperplates are obviously the most important historic documents. The two copperplates discovered in the Salban Vihar have yielded imformation of great significance and value. They have revealed for the first time the existence of a Buddhist dynasty of Deva rules (C. 7th—8th centuries A. D.) which is not recorded in the Indo-Pakistan history.

Three of the four copperplates discovered at Charpatra Mura belong to the Chandras of Bengal. These have furnished us for the first time correct information about the genealogy of the Chandra rulers, their military exploits and importance during the period between 900 A. D. and 1050 A. D. We have already discussed the contents of these copperplates in course of our study on the Devas and Chandras of Samatata Mandala.

The fourth copperplate from Charpatra Mura is of a later date. It belongs to a local Hindu ruler or chief of Vaishnava sect, Sri Viradhara Deva. It records the grant of 17 padas of land in Samatata Mandal a to the venerable god Sri Vasudeva, also well-known as Sri Lauda Madhava. It has yielded interesting evidence of a Vaishnava dynasty which seems to have ruled over Samatata after the decline of Buddhism in Bengal during the 11th—12th centuries A. D.

B. Coins :

The importance of coins for fixing the Chronology of a site is indeed very great and it is most fortunate that a large number of silver and gold coins has been recovered from the debris of different sites of Mainamati. Moreover, three hoards of 227 gold and silver coins were found inside earthenware pots, hidden below the early period of cells at Salban Vihara.

The first hoard contains three gold coins. One of the coins belongs to Chandra Gupta II (380 A. D.—414 A D.). It is of the Lakshmi and Archer type. The second is an imitation of the Gupta coins. The third gold coin is of special interest. It is inscribed with the same legend 'Bhangala Mrigankasya' as found on the seals of copperplates of the Deva kings, and thus seems to have been issued by one of them.

The second hoard contains 52 silver coins in three donominations and these were found below the first period floor of a cell of Salban Vihara. The third hoard contains 172 silver coins in the largest donominations only. They are all

of the "Bull and Triratna type ;" on the obverse we find a seated humped bull ; usually the legend, 'Patikera' is inscribed above the bull but 'Lalitakarah,' 'Dharma-Vijaya' also occur on some of them.

The discovery of such a large number of the "Bull and Tri-ranta" type silver coins at Mainamati," observes Dr F A. Khan, "is of great significance. They happen to be the first currency finds of ancient Bengal. Their number, associations, find spot and other available evidences strengthen our view that these coins were issued locally by a sufficiently powerful and prosperous dynasty of independent rulers, most probably the Devas, and not imported from Arakan, as was generally assumed hitherto. On palaeographical grounds also these coins are assigned to the 7th –8th centuries A. D., the date assigned to the Devas."

Abbasid Coins :
Trade relations with the Arabs.

Among the the Mainamati coins there are two specimens of extra-ordinary interst—a gold and silver coin with legends of Kufic characters. They belong to the Abbasid Caliphs of Bagdad. The silver coin discovered from the early level of a cell at Salban Vihara belongs to the early Abbasid period.

According to Dr. F. A. Khan "The gold coin discovered from upper levels at Kotila Mura belongs to the last Abbasid Caliph, Abu Ahmad Abdullah al Mustassim b'llah

(1242 A. D.—1258 A. D.). These coins are perhaps the first documentary evidence of Arab trade with South-East Bengal during the Buddhist period."

C. Bronze Images:

A good number of miniature bronze votive images of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Tara and Sarvani etc. have been recovered from early levels of Salban Vihara. All these statuettes, characterized by their highly uniform finish—somewhat resembling their counter-part in stone work—faithfully reflect the transitional phase of Mahayana Buddhism to Tantric form during the 7th—8th centuries A. D. and seem to have been influenced by the Pala Art.

In some specimens, Buddha is represented in the 'Bhumisparsha mudra' or earth-touching attitude with left hand resting on lap, while in others, he is seated in 'Dhyani mudra' or meditation-pose.

The bronze statue of Bodhisattva Padmapani seated on a lotus throne, is profusely ornamented. His legs are crossed and in his left hand he holds a lotus with a long stalk.

Goddess Tara is shown seated gracefully with her pendant right leg placed on a lotus and the left folded. Her right hand is in the Varada-mudra i. e. the boon bestowing pose, while the left holds a lotus. She is profusely decorated with various ornaments.

The image of goddess Sarvani is somewhat large, seven inches in height and is shown standing on a lion. She has four arms which have suffered with age and for that reason it is difficult to identify the attributes.

D. Stone Sculptures :

Stone sculptures are comparatively rare in Mainamati, only a few specimens have been found at Kotila Mura. This might perhaps be due to the paucity of stone materials suitable for sculptural art in this region. A unique image of Avalokiteswara with four arms was discovered during excavation of Kotila Mura. He is accompanied by a multitude of smaller figures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist deities, all placed on lotus seats and joined together by long stalks and attended by lay worshippers at the bottom. Two of the reliefs are inscribed with the Buddhist creed, the script of which could be assigned to a date not later than 7th century A. D.

These grey coloured sculptures carved in shale represent, according to Dr. F. A. Khan, a unique group of sculptures. They differ from all the known schools of sculptural art of the sub-continent.

E. Terracotta Plaques :

Of all the antiquities discovered in course of Mainamati Excavations, none attracts more attention than the terracotta plaques recovered from different mounds. A large

number of interesting terracotta plaques were either found in a loose condition or in situ, arranged in a single row round the western projection of the basement wall of the cruciform shrine of Salban Vihara.

"These Plaques," observes Dr. F. A. Khan, "provide an interesting study of the popular folk-art of ancient Bengal. Besides giving a true picture of the social and cultural life of the people of those days, they throw a considerable light on the ancient history and religious practices of this region. Made of such a cheap and common material as the clay, the local artist has achieved almost a marvel in sculptural art. Its vitality, richness and variety is striking. It is distinguishable, like that of the Paharpur monuments, as a school of unique art by its predominant quality of dynamic movement and easy expressiveness, free from academic traditions. Though not so large in number, these plaques are superior to the Paharpur series in richness of details and artistic perfection."

The bewildering variety of subject matter depicted on these plaques is note worthy. It includes almost any subject that a rural artistic mind could conceive of. The terracotta plaques reveal scenes drawn from the daily lives of the people, creations of God and nature in various stages of movement, equipoise, emotion and experience. All lives are represented - divine, semi divine, human, animal, bird and flora—not to speak of popular stories and decorative patterns, motifs and compositions.

Among the divine, Buddha, Bodhisattva Padmapani, Vajrapani etc. are depicted and it would appear that representations of the divinities of the hierarchical religion are

rare. The Buddha is represented as seated in Vajrasana with right hand in bhumisparsa attitude. Padmapani is seated in maharajalila pose with kundalas in the ears, braided hair in curls, right hand resting on the ground and left holding lotus by its stalk.

Among the semi-divine, Yakshas, Vidyadharas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Kimpurushas are noticed.

Among the human, warriors with different weapons of war, archers, men fighting with tigers, acrobats balancing bodies on their hands, sages and ascetics, musicians with their instruments, and domestic and family studies are represented with all their local and ethnical characteristics.

Terracottas representing animal study consist of lion, wild boar, antelope, pig, elephant, monkey, rhinoceros and composite animals. Similarly we find serpents from the reptile class and among birds ducks and the royal swans are conspicuous.

Among the flora we have specimens of lotus and lily, trees, plants and creepers.

In making a comparative and critical estimate of the Mainamati terracottas Mr. T. N. Rama Chandran makes the following observation : "The plaques recovered.. offer very interesting study, as at Paharpur and Mahasthan in North Bengal and in similar monuments of Pagan where also they decorated the outer walls revealing the same dynamic movement and expressive of popular fancy and folk imagination or folk art. In the art that these terra-cottas reveal we cannot see much of Pala and Sena artistic

tendencies as both Pala and Sena constituted a hieratic school in which little scope was afforded to folk art. If we remember this it will be easy to appreciate that the themes are drawn from the daily life of the people, from all creations of God and nature in the various stages of activity, emotion, movement and rest. There is a purposeful rhythm running through the whole series, as at Paharpur, which intimately connects this folk art with contemporaneous stone representations of the heiratic religious art of Bengal of the period. Besides giving us a true insight into the real social life of the people of those days they help to throw a flood of light on the history of the place and the religion of the monuments which they were decorating."

F. Ornamental bricks :

The carved bricks which served as ornamental borders of the Terracotta plaques and the decorated mouldings of the shrines, are of pleasing designs and bear floral and geometric patterns. Stepped-pyramid and dental edges are the two popular decorative devices. Some cornice bricks represent pyramidic and drooping lotus designs. Some of the corner brackets contain floral vases.

G. Votive Stupas and Sealings :

At Kotila Mura a large number of unbaked clay Votive stupas encasing bone relics and tiny sealings inscribed with the Buddhist creed have been discovered. Each of these miniature stupas must have been prepared in a mould. A large number of terracotta sealings depicting the Buddhist creed and stupas in relief have also been found. It appears that each of these miniature stupas was consecrated

by the presence of these seals and the offering of such a stupa must have been considered by the devotees as an act of religious merit.

Excavations at Salban Vihara yielded a red stone seal and a terracotta sealing of great importance. The stone seal belonged to one Padmadhara. The upper part of the terracotta sealing depicts the royal emblem of the Deva kings represented by a Dharmachakra on a terraced pedestal, flanked on either side by two seated deer symbolizing the First Sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath. The lower part contains a three-lined inscription, recording the name of Sri Bhava Deva, the fourth ruler of the Deva dynasty. The inscription below the symbol reads : "Sri Bhava Deva Mahavihara-Arya Bhikshu sanghasya" that is, Sri Bhava Deva, the builder of the great Monastic Establishment. On the authority of this inscription it may fairly be ascertained that this Mahavihara was established by Sri Bhava Deva in the 8th century A. D.

H. Buddhist Monastic Pottery :

Potsherds were picked up in large numbers from Ananda Raja's Palace ruins (Mound No. 5) and it can be readily recognized that they were of pans, lids and pottery. Some of them had designs, such as chevron, straight lines, herring bone, squares and trellis.

From Rupban Mura (Mound No. 10) potsherds of pans, pot-rests and of broad cooking vessels were recovered in large numbers. Some of them show incised designs such as lotus petals, dentils, herring bone, zig-zag, chevron and straight lines.

A large collection of pottery has been recovered from excavations of Salban Vihara mound. It occurs in profusion in the first two periods associated with fireplaces inside the cells. The main types include shallow round base cooking pots with incised decorations at the bottom. The designs consist of a variety of gird, herring bone and criss-cross patterns. Water pitchers, large storage jars fixed in floors, spouted vessels, sprinklers, shallow dishes, bowls and a large number of oil lamps, saucer type with long stands have been found.

In the later periods the earlier type was replaced by a fine-textured grey pottery. This new ware is characterized by well-fired medium-thick fabric, deep body, well-defined and developed features. The forms include globular cooking pots, cups and bowls with deep body, and vases with long ornamental necks.

Some inscribed potsherds have been recovered from the early levels of the monastery cells at Salban Vihara. They appear to be the body fragments of begging bowls of monks. The scripts, according to Dr. F. A. Khan, bear resemblance with those of the Deva coins and copper plates.

I. Miscellaneous Finds :

A number of minor objects of every day use have also been found from all the sites. All these objects throw interesting light on the life and culture of the people of those days.

Metal objects include gold, silver and bronze ornaments such as finger-rings, ear-rings, bangles ; circular pieces of silver ingots, iron nails, hinges, chain-links, fish-hooks, digging tools, knife blades etc.

Stone objects include grinding stones and mills, pestles and pieces of red ochre. Mention must also be made of the semi-precious stone-beads, a large number of which have been recovered from different sites. Glass and shell objects consist mostly of bangles.

Mention must also be made of a few interesting objects like the stone knife blades made of fossilised wood abundantly found all over Mainamati Area. "This is perhaps," according to Dr. F. A. Khan, "an interesting case of finding stone implements in use in so late a period."

Fossil wood of Mainamati Area :

Specimens of fossil wood collected from the Lalmai range, which are locally called 'bones of Asuras,' were investigated by the experts of the Geological survey of India and the Calcutta University before Partition. Such studies have led experts to declare the Lalmai range as of exceptional interest because the fossil wood finds help in correlating the Lalmai or Tippera rocks with the other Indian rock systems of known age, particularly with 'the fossil wood group of Burma.' The Lalmai range has been supposed to correspond to the lower series of the Irrawaddy Division.

J. Conclusions :

During the years of the World War II when military contractors were digging out bricks from some mounds of Mainamati for military purpose, some objects of archaeo-

logical importance were discovered and the matter was brought to the notice of the local government by the present writer and it was also reported to the Archaeological Department of India. Mr. T. N. Ramachandran, the then superintendent of the archaeological section of Indian Museum visited the sites and examined the antiquities. Subsequently Dr. Mortimer Wheeler, Director of the Archaeological Survey of India made a preliminary Survey of the whole area and declared the mounds to be protected under the Monuments Act and thus brick depradations were stopped. Dr. R. C. Majumdar, the eminent historian and ex-Vice-chancellor of Dacca University had made the following pronouncement at that time :

"At last a veritable mine of valuable antiquities has been found in Bengal. It would be nothing short of a calamity if these extensive remains of antiquity are not spared and Bengal should spare no efforts to preserve these priceless relics of history."

Subsequent Archaeological Excavations of Salban Vihara, Kotila Mura and Charpatra Mura have proved beyond doubt that the Mainamati area is 'a veritable mine of valuable antiquities' and contains 'priceless relics of history.'

The ensemble of evidence from the copper plates, terracotta sealings, inscribed potsherds, gold and silver coins, bronze images, stone sculptures, terracotta plaques etc. lend support to the view that Salban Vihara, Kotila Mura and Charpatra Mura establishments and the civilization and culture represented by them belong to a period between 7th and 12th centuries A. D.

They originated and flourished under the Buddhist Deva rulers, a new dynasty hitherto unknown in Indo-Pakistan history. The two copper plates discovered in the Salban Vihara have yielded information regarding the Deva rulers (C. 7th—8th centuries A. D.). These Buddhist establishments reached the zenith of their glory in the subsequent period under the powerful and prosperous Chandras of of Rohitagiri. Three copper plates discovered at Charpatra Mura provide us with detailed informations about the Chandras and help us in fixing the correct geneology of the Chandra rulers (900—1050 A. D). It may be asserted that the Mainamati Excavations have thrown a flood of light on the art and culture of South-East Bengal for the period between the 7th and 12th centuries A. D. and added a glorious chapter to the history of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Meanwhile the archaeological excavations in the Mainamati area still continue and bid fair to yield more brilliant results in the future.

Regarding the decline and fall of the glorious civilization represented by archaeological discoveries of Mainamati Dr. F. A. Khan, Field Director, Mainamati Excavations has made the following observation :

"Their decay and final end is still now somewhat obscure. But since no evidence of physical damage or destruction has been observed in the excavations,it is reasonable to conclude that the decay was a gradual and natural one, most probably due to the revival of Hinduism and lack of royal patronage. The copper plate of the Hindu ruler, Sri Viradhara Deva, seems to be an emphatic reminder of this fact."

"The End"

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